

THE SCHEMES OF COLONEL CLAY

BEING EPISODES IN THE LIFE OF A MASTER ROGUE

By Grant Allen

THE EPISODE OF THE GAME OF POKER

Number X

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"Seymour," my brother-in-law,
a deep drawn sigh, as we
took George next day in the
Rialto and Saratoga Railroad, "No
Peter Porter for me, if you please
of disguise. Now that when
Colonel Clay is here in America
serve no good purpose; so I don't
well receive the social con-
and proper respect to which"
and naturally entitled to
"And which they secure for most
part (except from hotel clerks even
in this republican land.) I would
be."

For in my humble opinion, a sound
copper-bottomed snobbishness
at Lloyd's, gave me the born
American citizen.
We traveled through states, ac-
cordingly, for the next months,
from Maine to California, and
Oregon to Florida, and our own
as Charles facetiously, "it-or,
in other words, looking at the man-
agement and control of the ranches,
synonymous with mining and
we inquired about every one of
the result of our investigations ap-
peared to be, as Charles facetiously
told me, as if the Sabians who
in a body to Kansas, Nebraska, and
that several thousand of cattle
seemed mysteriously to have
disappeared into the air of the
prairies just before the morning
sun.

However, we were fortunate in
avoiding the incurable, have migrated
himself, who, in an enchanted carpet
menagerie, on the one hand, and
to other happy hunting grounds.
It was a happy day in New York, on
ourselves safe for so long a term of
freedom from the colonel's depre-
dations (as Charles facetiously
called them) had done my
but I will not, with and spirits a
world of good, was so lively that he
began to feel a yellow fever, then
have succumb, or eaten him-
raging in New York did ourselves, on
a generous "fure of clamor,"
a general, "backed ducks," "Catawba
yaches," "cherry brandy," "cock-
pals," "strawberry shortcake," "ice cream,
corn dogs," and a Colorado corpse re-
solutely.

However, that may be, Charles re-
turned to New York in great tri-
umphant, and, as an antagonist, he cheerfully
wishes the invitation of his brother
millionaire, Senator Wrengrind, to
that perfect number, an octave. He
was a nouveau riche himself—the
newest of the new—commonly known
in exclusive, old-fashioned New York
society as the Gilded Squatter; for he
"struck his reef" no more than ten
years ago; and he was therefore dou-
bly anxious after "the American
style," to be "just daisy with
culture." In this capacity of Mac-
cenas he had invited, among others,
the latest of English literary arri-
vée in New York, Mr. Algernon Cole-
yard, the famous poet, and leader of
the Briar Rose school of West coun-
try fiction.

"You know him in London, of
course?" he observed to Charles with
a smile, as we waited dinner for our
guests.
"No," Charles answered, stolidly. "I
have not had that honor. We move,
you see, in different circles. I ob-
served by Senator Wrengrind's face
that he quite misapprehended my
brother-in-law's meaning. Charles
wished to convey, of course, that Mr.
Coleyard belonged to a mere literary
and Bohemian set in London, while he
himself moved on a more exalted plane
of peers and politicians. But the
senator, better accustomed to the new
rich point of view, understood Charles
to mean that he had not the entireties
of that distinguished coterie in which
Mr. Coleyard posed as a shining lumina-
ry. Which naturally made him rate
even higher than before his literary
acquisition."

At twenty minutes past the hour the
poet entered. Even if we had not
been already familiar with his por-
trait at all ages in the Strand Maga-
zine, we should have recognized him
at once for a genuine bard by his im-
passioned eyes, his delicate mouth, the
artistic twist of one gray lock upon
his expansive brow, the grizzled mus-
tache that gave point and force to the
genial smile, and the two white rows
of perfect teeth behind it. Most of
his fellow-guests had met Coleyard
before at a reception given by the
Lotus Club that afternoon, for the
bard had reached New York but the
previous evening; so Charles and I
were the only visitors who remained
to be introduced to him.

The lion of the hour with no topi-
cary of any kind, but he wore in his
buttonhole a dainty blue flower, whose
name I do not know, and as he bowed
distantly to Charles, whom he sur-
veyed through his eyeglasses, the gleam
of a big diamond in the middle of his
shirt front, betrayed the fact that the
Briar Rose school, as it was called
(from his famous epic), had at least
succeeded in making money out of
poetry. He explained to me a little
of the fact that he was over in
New York to look after his royalties.
"The buggars," he said, "only gave
me eight hundred pounds on my last
volume. I couldn't stand that; you
know, for a modern bard, moving with
the age, can only sing when duly
wounded up; so we investigate. But a
penny in the slot don't you see, and the poet will
play for you."

Exactly like myself," Charles re-
marked, in common. "I'm in-
terested in mines, and I, too, go
come over to look after my royalties."
The poet placed his eyeglasses in his
eye once more and surveyed Charles
deliberately from head to foot. "Ah,"
he murmured slowly. "He said
word more, but somehow everybody
told me Charles was demagogue."
I saw that Wrengrind, when he went
in to dinner, hastily altered the
table, and marked the places. He evi-
dently put Charles at first to next
the poet; he varied that arrangement
now, setting Algernon Coleyard be-
tween the railway king and a magazine
editor. I have seldom seen a re-
spected brother-in-law so completely
silenced.

The poet's conduct during dinner
was most peculiar. He kept quoting
poetry at inopportune moments.
"Toast, lamb or boiled turkey, sir?"
said the footman.
"Mary had a little lamb," said the
poet. "I shall imitate Mary."
Charles and the Senator thought
the remark undignified.

After dinner, however, under the
mellowing influence of some excellent
Roeder, Charles began to expand
again and grew lively and anecdotal.
The poet had made us all laugh not
a little with various capital stories of
London literary society—at least two
of them. I think new ones—and
Charles was moved by generous im-
pulsion to contribute his own share to
the amusement of the company. He
was in excellent cue. He is not often
brilliant; but when he chooses he has
a certain dry vein of caustic humor
which is decidedly funny, though not
perhaps strictly without being vulgar.
On this particular night, then, he
warmed with the admirable Wrengrind
champaigne—the best made in America
launched out in a full and em-
brodered description of the various
ways in which Colonel Clay had de-
ceived him. I will not say that he
narrated them in full with the same
brilliance that he had shown in the
show in these pages; he suppressed
not a few of the most amusing details,
and on no other ground, apparently,
because they happened to concern him-
self—and he enlarged a good deal
on the surprising cleverness with which
he had cured his man; but still, making all
allowances for naïve vanity in con-
cealment and additions, he was dis-
tinctly funny—he represented the mat-
ter for once in its ludicrous rather
than in its disastrous aspect. He ob-
served also, looking around the table,
that after all he had lost by Colonel
Clay in four years of persecution that
he often lost by one injudicious move
in a single day on the London Stock
exchange; while he seemed to imply
to the solid men of New York that he
would cheerfully sacrifice such a fea-
sible as that in return for the amuse-
ment and excitement of the chase
which the colonel had afforded him.
The poet was pleased.

"You are a man of spirit, Sir
Charles," he said. "I love to see this
fine old English admiration of pluck
and adventure! The fellow must re-
ally have some good in him, after all.
I should like to take notes of a few of
those stories; while he would supply nice
material for basing a romance upon."
"I hardly know whether I'm exactly
the man to make the hero of a novel,"
Charles murmured, with complacence.
And he certainly didn't look it.
"I was thinking rather of Colonel
Clay as the hero," the poet responded
coldly.

"Ah, that's the way with you men
of letters," Charles answered, growing
warm. "You always have a sneaking
sympathy with the rascals. He was
like some good in him, after all. I
should like to take notes of a few of
those stories; while he would supply nice
material for basing a romance upon."
"That may be better," Coleyard re-
plied in an icy voice, "than sympathy
with the worst form of stock exchange
speculation."

The company smiled uneasily. The
railway king wriggled. Wrengrind
tried to change the subject hastily,
but Charles would not be put down.
"You must hear the end, though,"
he said. "That's not quite the worst.
The meanest thing about the man is
that he's also a hypocrite. He wrote
me such a letter at the end of his last
trip—here, positively here, in Amer-
ica! And he proceeded to give his
own version of the Quackenboss inci-

dent, enlivened with sundry imagina-
tive bursts of pure Vandrift fancy.

When Charles spoke of Mrs. Quack-
enboss, the poet smiled. "The worst
of married women," he said, "is—that
you can't marry them; the worst of
unmarried women is—that they want
to marry you."

But when it came to the letter the
poet's eye was upon my brother-in-
law. Charles, I must faintly admit gar-
bled the document badly. Still, even
so, some gleam of good feeling re-
mained in its sentences. But Charles
ended all by saying:

"So to crown his misdeeds, the
rascal shows himself a whining cur
and a disgusting Pharisee."

"Don't you think," the poet inter-
posed, in his cultivated drawl, "he
may have really meant it? We
should not some grain of compassion
have stirred his soul still? Some re-
mains of conscience made him shrink
from betraying a man who confided
in him? I have an idea myself that
even the worst of rogues have always
an underhand regard for a scoundrel."

"Perhaps so," the poet answered.
"For we are all of us human. Let him
be without sin among us cast the
first stone." And then he relaxed into
moody silence.

We rose from the table. Cigars went
round. We adjourned to the smoking-
room. It was a Moorish marvel, with
Oriental hangings. There Senator
Wrengrind and Charles exchanged re-
minders of bonanzas and ranches and
other setting postprandial topics,
while the magazine editor cut in now
and again with a pertinent inquiry or
a laugh, and sarcastic parallel in-
stance. It was clear he had an eye to
future copy. Only Algernon Coleyard
sat brooding and silent, with his chin
on his hand and his brow intent, mu-
sling and gazing at the embers in the
fireplace. The hand, by the way, was
remarkable for a curious, antique-
looking ring, apparently of Egyptian
or Etruscan workmanship, with a pro-
tecting gem of several large facets.
Once only, in the midst of a game of
hist, he broke out with a single com-
ment.

"Hawkins was made an earl," said
Charles, speaking of some London ac-
quaintance.

"What for?" asked the Senator.
"Successful adulteration," said the
poet, tartly.

"Honors are easy," the magazine
editor put in.

"And two by tricks to Sir Charles,"
the poet added.

Toward the close of the evening,
however, the poet still remaining
moody, not to say positively grumpy—
Senator Wrengrind proposed a friendly
game of Swedish poker. It was the
latest fashionable variant in Western
society on the old gambling round, and
few of us knew it, save the omniscient
poet and the magazine editor. It was
turned out afterward that Wrengrind
proposed that particular game because
he had heard Coleyard observe at the
Lotus Club the same afternoon that it
was a favorite amusement of his. Now,
however, for a while he objected to
playing. He was a poor man, he said,
and the rest were all rich; why should
he throw away the value of a dozen
golden sonnets just to add one more
pinnacle to the gilded roofs of a mil-

linaire's palace? Besides, he was half
way through with an ode he was in-
diting to republican simplicity. The
pristine austerity of a democratic sen-
sibility, he had naturally inspired
him with memories of Donatatus, the
Fabii, Camillus. But Wrengrind, dimly
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a hand with the financiers.

"You can pass, you know," he said,
"as often as you like; and you can
sink low, or go to the bottom, accord-
ing to your inclination. It's a democratic
game; every man decides for himself
how high he will play, except the
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less you want it."

"Oh! if you insist upon it," Coleyard
drawled out, with languid reluctance,
"I'll play, of course. I won't spoil your
evening. But remember, I'm a poet! I
have strange inspirations."

The cards were "squeezers"—that is
to say, had the suit and the number of
pips in each printed small in the cor-
ner, as well as over the face, for ease
of reference. We played low at first.
The poet seldom staked when he
did—a few pounds—he lost with singu-
lar persistence. He wanted to play for
doubletons or sequins, and could with
difficulty be induced to condescend to
dollars.

Charles looked across at him at last;
the stakes by that time were fast ris-
ing higher, and we played for ready
money. Notes lay thick on the green
cloth.

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"No," he answered calmly. "I am
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That was dollars, of course, but it
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"Good shot!" Charles murmured, pre-
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tests losing.

"Inspiration!" the poet mused, and
looked once more abstracted.

Charles dealt again.
The poet watched the deal with
bored, fishy eyes. His thoughts were
far away. His lips moved audibly.